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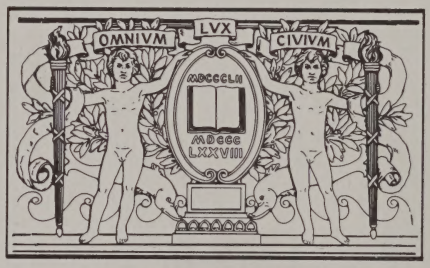

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HOLLIS STREET CHURCH,

1862–1877.

Rev Star King noticed

Historical Discourse, by George Leonard Chaney.

1879.

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HOLLIS STREET CHURCH,

1862–1877.

A HISTORICAL DISCOURSE

BY

GEORGE LEONARD CHANEY.

BOSTON:
GEO. H. ELLIS, PRINTER, 101 MILK STREET.
1879.

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To as many as were of the Church of Christ in Hollis Street on October 1, 1877, *Greeting:*—

When my predecessor in the pulpit of Hollis Street Church, Dr. Samuel West — than whom Moses was not more meek, nor Job more patient — left his parish in Needham that he might come to Boston, he omitted the customary farewell sermon. He was blamed at the time, for what seemed a lack of sensibility and respect for long-established usage. But as he says in his autobiography: Whatever feeling of the sort existed, it all wore off as I met my old friends from time to time. "As most of them frequented the Boston market, they were frequently in town. I always met them with a smiling countenance and friendly greeting. If I could do them any kindness, I embraced the opportunity with pleasure."

Nevertheless, Dr. West felt that he had made a mistake in not complying with the general custom. His "exquisite feelings" or "tender and benevolent passions," as he calls them, ought not, he thinks, to have interfered with so reasonable a requirement.

Now, although I would rather renew the ministry of Dr. West than that of any of my predecessors, I do not wish to repeat his mistakes or limit my ambition to copying his only ministerial fault. I have, therefore, resolved to print the last sermon which I preached in Hollis Street Church, and send it, with this letter, to all who were with me there, at the time of my resignation. I had given two memorial discourses, containing the history of the church from 1732 to 1861. It was announced in the public print at the time, that I would continue this history.

This announcement, as I thought, would be enough to secure

the attendance of all whose attachment to the church was a present power with them. What I had to say did not immediately concern any others. And here I must protest against that heartless custom which obliges ministers and people, in the hour of their separation, to make a display of their tears, or, what is worse, a scandal of their indifference, when the sacred ties which should unite them are cut in two. If it be weakness to feel myself unequal to the task of sundering such ties by public proclamation, and in the full gaze of novelty-seeking people, I plead guilty to the charge. I could not do it, and I did not. But the sermon which I preached had all the intention in my mind, and all the effect, I am sure, upon the minds of those who heard it, of a final discourse. In it, I gave my opinion as to the calling and best possible accomplishment of the church which wished to abide in Hollis Street. In this utterance, I did not win the consent of those who conduct your church. This was no surprise or disappointment to me. It was this difference — our only vital difference, I believe, in fifteen years — which had already decided me to leave my position.

But I could not print or repeat my views, so long as the church was endeavoring to make good its opposing policy. For this reason I have kept silence for seventeen months, choosing rather to suffer the blame of seeming insensibility and ingratitude towards my old parish than to add a feather's weight of objection to its chosen course.

The necessity for silence no longer exists. You have found a minister in whom you are happily united. Thus united and led, you will have no just objection to the printing of this sermon. On the contrary, its story of what you have accomplished in the past will inspire you with new hope and new endeavors in the future. In this belief, and also with the desire to make some atonement for the appearance of insensibility with which my parting from you was accompanied, I print and send to you this sermon. If any one reading it to the end still judges me lacking

in love toward you or appreciation of your working together with me in the Christian ministry, or holds that some more definite and prolonged leave-taking was due to you, I ask him, "How could I preach a farewell sermon before I was ready to say 'farewell'?" Until this moment, when a new and freshly-loved minister occupies my old post, I have not ceased to feel its claims and answer to its call. Some of the tenderest services of my ministry in Hollis Street Church have come within the last year, — that year of grace in which you and I have agreed to acknowledge no debt between us, save to love one another. I protest, therefore, by the memory of those sacred ministries among you,— ministries which a formal separation seemed to forbid, — that until this hour I could not offer you a farewell sermon, because I had not taken my farewell. But it is different now. I can say the farewell now. Not in your pulpit, not in formal phrase, or with public outcry. But I say it here and now, in this whispered word which will go into your homes and leave the blessing which I may not speak aloud.

My old friends, if this paper could by some miracle be made to live, it should return the clasp with which you hold it, with the pressure as of a faithful hand.

G. L. C.

CAMBRIDGE, March, 1879.

DISCOURSE.

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it again." — St. John ii., 19.

In parting with this church, Mr. King, in one of his letters, with affectionate solicitude forecast its future, and with excellent sense prescribed its true policy: "You will get a new minister, and within two or three years leave the old spot and settle further south." It is fifteen years since this advice was given, and the church is still here.

Mr. King did not realize the rapid decay which succeeded his departure to California, and the utter inability to follow his advice which a year or two of separation from his inspiring presence had caused. When the tie which bound Mr. King and his Hollis Street Parish was broken, there was not strength enough left to undertake the journey. Nothing but the determined spirit and enthusiastic personal affection of a few, a very few, of his old parish kept the old ship from going to pieces. Most of the people had either found new church homes, or contented themselves with no habitual house of worship; and of the few who remained, nearly all had decided where they would go when the seemingly inevitable break-up came.

In this time of visible decay and imminent decease, it happened that among the preachers who from Sunday to Sunday kept up the tradition of preaching and worship in this pulpit was a young theological

student. He was spending a brief winter vacation in this vicinity, and, having preached two or three sermons before the professors and students without disgrace, he was encouraged to accept an invitation to preach in Hollis Street Church. At that time his mind was so bent upon missionary enterprise, and his face so turned toward the West as its natural field, that he preached in this pulpit without the least sense of candidacy, or thought of the possibility of coming here. It was with real surprise, therefore, that he received an invitation to preach again, for three Sundays, in this church, on his next vacation, four months later. And still, so sure was he that his calling would carry him to the West that he took the invitation merely as a favorable opportunity for vacation service, and had none of the pallor of candidacy about him as he ascended the pulpit stairs. The young man was ardent, enthusiastic, not yet accustomed to speak in so large a place; but that could be acquired: not — but why should I torture you with a study in vivisection? The speaker is the man. He had enjoyed the advantages of a university training at Cambridge, and, having gone to Meadville to prepare some boys for college, he had entered the Divinity School in that place. In that day Dr. Oliver Stearns was giving the school the vigor of his commanding character, and the thoroughness of his judicious scholarship. The mark of his moral earnestness was impressed upon all his pupils. This student was no exception to the rule. There must have been either the signs or the imitations of power about him, for he made good his earlier impression of adaptedness to this place, and received a unanimous call to settle here.

Three other roads met at the same point, and for more than a month it was uncertain which he would

take. But there was a narrower way at that time than either of these. The country was in the midst of its struggle for existence. It might be death to go into the army; but not to go was worse than death. He consulted an army chaplain,— the manly and devoted Scandlin,— and, urged by him, he at length decided to take this church. "You can do more for the country there than you can possibly do in the army," said Scandlin; and on that ground he came here. The small company of workers was very much in earnest, and very efficient. Increased, as it was gradually, by new comers, it did good service throughout the war.

Its contributions and labors were generous in proportion to its numbers and means, and what it gave was doubled in value by promptness and willingness. Meantime the free pulpit offered its new incumbent a vantage ground for patriotic speech and humane prayer, and he used it to the full extent of his power in the interest of freedom, union, and emancipation. In looking over his MSS., I find sermons uttered at every crisis of the war. Some men thought he preached too much about the war and its issues. One prudent Gamaliel cautioned him against it,— I need not say in vain. Another, younger and less prudent, abruptly left his pew one morning when the sensitive theme again presented itself. But the new incumbent had given them fair warning of his tendencies in his earliest preaching among them, using what was then the test of a man's civil and religious mettle — the name and deeds of John Brown — to illustrate his teaching. But the average and prevailing sentiment of the parish was wholly in accord with the prophecies and arguments of freedom. The converts of Mr. King — as many of them were — could not be otherwise than loyal,

public-spirited, and anti-slavery. And if any did not share in these sentiments, all had learned from the same generous and persuasive lips to respect the preacher's privilege of freedom in speech. All through the war, the warmest and most active sympathy with its heroes and sufferers prevailed among this people. The women vied with the men, and perhaps exceeded them, in their unwearied labor and contribution to the needs of the army. Thus sustained and abetted in his most pressing and, for the time being, transcendent interest,— the salvation and purification of his country, — the new minister was as happy as the anxious times would allow. Surely a minister's pride is not without virtue, when its object is a faithful and zealous people, rather than anything *he* has done. And the earnest, hearty, diligent, and kindly activity of this small company of Christian patriots in that trying day was enough to arouse a natural pride in their chosen friend and leader.

It was some compensation for the loss of that one privilege of a man, in that heroic day,— the dying for his country,— to feel that life, at least, was not without some lesser services in the hour of her need. Among these services was a mission to Fredericksburg, during the Battles of the Wilderness, when that shattered and broken city was one vast hospital for the wounded. The leave of absence which was freely granted enabled him to minister to the terrible needs of our wounded soldiers; and on his return, both minister and people worked with a chastened but intensified earnestness for the support of the Union, and the restoration of its peace and prosperity.

That it was no blind sentiment of loyalty to country right or wrong, no quick enthusiasm dependent on

the excitement of war to maintain its glow, but a true comprehension of the issues at stake, and a firm principle to rescue and maintain the cause of equal civil rights, which animated this people, is shown by the continuance of their contributions and services after the war had closed. The spectacle of millions of people, black and white, within our own country, crippled by ignorance and unable either to appreciate their newly-found freedom or rightly use it, was hardly less pitiful than the slaughter of the battle-field. Immediately, through the Freedman's Aid Society and the Soldiers' Memorial Society, the beneficent energies of the church went forth on their errand of reconstruction. Two teachers were supported,—one for the colored people, and another for the poor white population. A member of this church went to Richmond and took charge of a colored orphan asylum there. Twice the minister went to that stubborn city, inspected its schools, and returned to quicken the home interest in the work. Meantime, at Charleston, S.C., a teacher supported by this church was teaching in the Shaw Memorial School, and sending monthly reports of the progress of her pupils.

Soon after Gen. Armstrong opened his Normal Institute at Hampton, the minister went there, and on his return urged the claims of that institution with vigor and success. It was in consequence of fatigue and exposure induced by this work that he was compelled to take a few months of rest in Florida. But this only enabled him to see yet more of the Southern schools. At Wilmington he visited the schools of Miss Amy Bradlee, and brought home her intense appeal without diminution of its earnestness. At Charleston he examined the Shaw Memorial School, and at Jacksonville, the schools for the freedmen. By this time these schools

were many of them independent of private support, but appeals still came from teachers scattered throughout the South for relief of various kinds: now a colored brother wanted books for his Sunday-school; now money for his support or the building of a church; now school-books were in demand; now clothing. Any and every probable want felt free to come and knock for admission at the chapel door.

In one way or another, all these varied wants were in part relieved. Nor did this distant charity at all diminish the charity which begins at home. There is no greater fallacy than the supposition that foreign missions injure home missions, or that interests that go far beyond one's immediate neighborhood imperil the good of that neighborhood. Just the reverse.

I take great pleasure in drawing my confirmation of this truth from this parish. The generosity quickened by the war and yet more solicited by the issues of that war, so far from neglecting its own, took new measures for their relief. The home charities of this church had previously been administered by the minister and kindly members of the parish. So long as it confined itself to well-known cases of poverty, this method was as good as any. But a new ambition for fuller service to the poor began to display itself. And with this ambition and the experience it brought in practice, came a sense of the necessity of a more competent oversight of charitable relief. Better no church relief of the poor at all than the indiscriminate almsgiving which well-disposed but inexperienced people are always tempted to give. The applications for help increased so largely, with the growing dimensions of the city and its wide-spread repute for benevolence, that it soon became apparent that they must all be referred to some

of the existing organizations outside the church, or simply turned away without an effort of relief, or aided without proper investigation, which would be the worst evil of all. To refer them to outside institutions and chapels, seemed to be surrendering the very crowning privilege of the church to other hands. To turn away these petitioners without an effort to aid them, might be canonical with priest or Levite, but was not in accordance with the Samaritan version of neighborliness; while to assist them without faithful inquiry, would be to invite imposition and nourish beggary. It seemed best to reorganize the church system of charitable relief. A board of charities was chosen by the congregation at large, to superintend the collection of contributions for charitable or other purposes. The Charitable Union, a vigorous and efficient working society, would continue to cut and make clothing for the poor, and minister, as it always had done so well, to the social and charitable instincts of the church. But the distribution of charitable relief was to be committed to a competent and responsible lady, who should give her entire time to the duty; receiving all applications for assistance, at a stated hour of each day, at the chapel; visiting the lodging of every applicant, and investigating his claims before extending aid, and coöperating with the members of the parish and the Charitable Union in all their work of relief. Fortunately, a woman was found with rare endowment, exceptional experience, and consecrated enthusiasm for the post. Miss M. Eliza Weeks became the special almoner to the poor, or minister's assistant, as she was called. This title was the one most acceptable to the minister himself, because he liked to feel that her work was pre-eminently the work of the ministry, and in it he wished Miss

Weeks to have the assurance of his readiness to co-operate with her in any way she desired.

From that day to this, a period of ten years, this system has been maintained with increasing proof of its wisdom and utility. It saves each year the full amount of the assistant's salary, in freeing the church from unworthy recipients of its bounty. It enables every member of the parish to escape alike the misery of turning the poor away unaided, and the reproach of aiding them injudiciously. By this arrangement, he is able to say to every such applicant: "Go to Hollis Street Chapel any day, from eleven to twelve." That is all. In more than half the cases, if unworthy, they will never come to the chapel. If worthy, they will certainly come. Having given my best attention to the subject of poverty and its relief in large cities, I confess I cannot conceive of any better system than this. And when the facilities for communication between the ministers to the poor are abundant and frequent, as they are coming to be, it seems to me almost perfect. Indeed, in the present state of things and in the probable future, such a system is simply commanded by common sense and common humanity. To desert it or essentially change it, after ten years of proved efficiency, and when at last you have a woman exceptionally fitted for its duties, would be, to my mind, a practical demonstration of the church's insufficiency to perform at all the function of charity. The sisterly ministrations of Eliza Weeks who laid down her life in this service, the brave labors and patient service of those who have followed her, the rare knowledge of human nature and zealous devotion to her work which characterize your present almoner, all make up a record of Christian ministry which is treasured wherever con-

stancy and devotion are honored, and which should be maintained, whatever else may go down.

As might have been expected, the charitable activity developed by the war, and disciplined by the ignorance and poverty it bequeathed, grew by what it fed on. We have been speaking of system or organization; but system and organization are useless without the means and disposition to be useful on the part of the people. Happily, both were at hand in those days, and a variety of happy attempts were made to flank the poverty and shiftlessness of the coming generation, by doing something to purify the tastes, quicken the consciences, and cultivate the practical powers of the young people of to-day.

For the improvement of their tastes, entertainments were provided in the chapel on winter evenings, and readings, tableaux, and music were given, free of charge, the tickets being mostly given to the newsboys, in the hope of winning them from the grosser attractions of the minstrels and cheap theatres. For the cultivation of their consciences, a second Sunday-school was started, the one already in existence being too full to receive further additions; and to this day, both schools are a part of your church curriculum. For the cultivation of their practical powers, sewing-schools were opened for the girls, and the boys were taught on winter evenings to cut and make brackets, boxes, and other pretty and useful articles in wood. This was the beginning of the "Whittling School," as it was afterwards familiarly called. And after five years of repeated trial and success, it culminated last winter in an industrial school, which bids fair to set the copy for the new education which is already beginning throughout the country,— the education which shall give to

theory the immediate illustration and impression of practical application. A report of this school, printed this year, is already, through the courtesy and hearty interest of the Commissioner of Education in Washington, in the hands of leading educators in every State in this Union. In addition to what was done in this direction in your own chapel, your minister labored in the cause in the school-board and among the teachers of the public schools, and rejoices in the belief that the success already attained in some of these schools for girls is only the earnest of what will soon be secured in all of them, viz., a working acquaintance with the arts of cutting, mending, and sewing.

In the line of elevation of the people's taste by refined amusement, it ought also to be said that the opening of the Music Hall to the people for the first time free of cost, for a series of concerts, was the result of our endeavors, and the first organ recitals were begun in this church by Mr. Eugene Thayer. A full account of your active ministry in these ways ought to include the conferences held in church and chapel on the leading charitable reforms; the districting of the city among the liberal churches,— a work which was consummated in your chapel; the originating of the Hospital-Sunday collections; the entertainment and assistance of the Flower Mission, which has made our chapel its home from the beginning; the first motion of relief among the churches in the time of the Chicago fire, and in the time of our own visitation by the destroying angel; and innumerable services to asylums, homes, prisons, and other public or private institutions for the unfortunate.

I dwell on these things, not merely or chiefly because they combine to recommend the record this church has

been making, but because they mark out, in distinguishable lines and practical ways, in what directions Christian humanity may go, what it may do, and how to do it. If the people of the land need anything supremely, it is the development and training of conscience, the purifying of their tastes, and the addition of skill to their crude labor.

In each of these departments, something marked and exemplary has been accomplished. The first head, viz., the development of the conscience, leads us naturally from the story of these missionary endeavors to the main function of the church,— public worship and the service of devotion. No patient service to humanity can be maintained without the practice of devotion. The soul that will not voluntarily prostrate itself before the Supreme Being in the worship of the church or the closet must submit to a more humbling prostration of itself in the failure of its enterprise. Whether the knowledge of this came by intuition or was gradually learned by experience, I cannot tell. I only know that, zealous of good works as the church and its minister were, *he* certainly was never tempted to slight the ministries or privileges of united prayer and praise for any of these things. He longed for religious confidence and communion more than for multiplied charities. He desired them for their own sake, wholly aside from the spirit of humanity they were sure to quicken. By nature, and by the best and sweetest religious experience of religion he had ever known, he coveted social and sympathetic devotion. The Christian ordinances, with their hallowed symbols,— baptism, confession, and communion,— were to him the very kernel of the church, without which it would be a hollow shell and a sterile seed. He had no spiritual

affinity and little practical patience with men who would drop from their congregational church-keeping, already bare to poverty, the small legacy of symbol that remained,— baptism and the Lord's supper,— that last asylum for the spirit of Christian discipleship. If these things had become unmeaning to anybody, it was, as he thought, because they meant too little themselves when they espoused the Christian Church and pledged themselves to its cause. He lost no opportunity, therefore, of urging the claims of these observances upon his people's regard, and even won reproach from some for the zeal and persistency with which he commended the sacred rites and devotional privileges of the church.

In the hope of supplying this foremost need of the church, and arousing and feeding the spiritual hunger and thirst of its people, a Wednesday-afternoon meeting was instituted and maintained, during the winter season, for more than ten years. If we may trust the testimony of those who attended them, these services were well adapted to promote spiritual edification and comfort. But it is doubtful if any religious services of the kind in this city ever reached fewer people. Courses of study were pursued both with and without the Sunday-school teachers, covering successively the men and women of the Old Testament; the life of Christ considered now in its connection with the Holy Land, now in its moral and spiritual teaching and significance, and again in its relations to human character, duty, and safety; the lives and acts of the apostles, and the life and epistles of St. Paul; practical ethics, church history, and Christian doctrine. There is hardly a topic or an interest germain to Christian culture which has not received thoughtful attention.

And methods of study and teaching, new at the time, but since widely adopted and copied, were first tried here with signal success.

The time would fail me, to speak of the intimate relations which the church has maintained with the associations and unions belonging to its denomination. Partly through the convenience of its central location, but even more largely on account of the hearty concern it had for the Unitarian body to which it belonged, its doors have been open, by day and by night, for ministerial unions, theological conferences, annual missionary meetings of the Unitarian Association, and courses of sermons inculcating liberal Christianity. So prominently has it stood forth in this way, as the rallying ground of the religious company to which it belongs, that it seems to me to give us a Providential pointing as to the ultimate purpose and natural calling of this church. It is not by accident, nor yet by our intelligent design, that our church has thus come to stand by and for our cause. It is our "manifest destiny," lifting us from the insecurity of border weakness to the dignity and permanence of consolidation with a strong union. Or, putting aside all rhetoric, let me say that I see, in these fifteen years of growing intimacy and practical identification of the church with the Unitarian cause, an indication of what may be its Providential calling. If Mr. King was right in saying, fifteen years ago, that the church must move then if it would maintain itself, much more can it be said to-day, when hardly one of its families lives within easy hearing of its bell. Is there anybody left who doubts this necessity? If so, I will give him another year to complete the evidence. That will be enough. For what charm have we to stay the morning star, or what

miraculous power by which we can hope to sit in our old chair by the sea-side and forbid the rising tide? It is idle to think of maintaining any longer on this spot a church of our traditional kind, *i.e.*, a church supported by steady church-going people, who want a convenient religious home for themselves and their children.

But it is not idle to think of maintaining a church for the people on this spot. A more fortunate location for that purpose could not be found. Already it has been coveted and sought by those canny people the Baptists, who would like nothing better than to start another Tremont Temple on this spot. And why cannot the Unitarians do what the Baptists would do? I believe they could. And I hope to live to see the day when the church so long and so distinctively associated with spontaneous liberality in thought and speech will be permanently in league with the Unitarian Association, and made the centre of all its operations. Such a project, proposed, aided, and carried out, as it might be, by you in conjunction with the American Unitarian Association (they will be ready when you are), would seal this spot and these walls to Unitarian Christianity, so long as there was such a thing on the earth. And what a consummation, how "devoutly to be wished," that would be! For one, I should feel that in doing the least thing to further it, I had done the best thing alike for your repute and continuance as a church, and for the Unitarian Church at large, of which you are a serving member.

I know that in thus forecasting your possible future, I overlook some painful changes which must be made, and some hard sacrifices of taste and feeling that must be endured. But to the man who truly loves his

church, nothing is too hard to do or bear, if it enlarges and secures that church's usefulness. If any one of you must suffer in such a change, I must suffer more. To me these ancient walls are dearer and more congenial than the most beautiful of modern temples. The relationship which you bear to each other as brethren is not more close than that which I bear to you all as brother, friend, and pastor. I have not borne you in my heart these fifteen years, sorrowing in your sorrows and rejoicing in your joys, without getting so grounded in my attachments here that no other hand than God's could uproot without killing me. But his hand can do it, and I begin to feel that it will. I see no other way. If I can make the sacrifice, I may surely call upon you to consider whether you too are not willing to consider the proposition to reconstruct your building and method of church administration, and maintain on this spot, in connection with the American Unitarian Association, a church of the people and for the people.

Brethren, if I make the appeal to you, it is your own record for the last fifteen years which gives me the courage. I have been telling you, with the painful brevity which our limits of time require, of some of the services we have rendered together to the city, the cause of Christian freedom, and the times in which we have been living. But I have not told that inner history of lay fidelity and generosity which could alone have sustained the church during this time. I have not told of the promptitude with which you sprang to the rescue of your ancient steeple, the very first year of my coming among you, and strengthened its timbers and upheld its pillars, at a large cost, easily raised

among you; I have not told of the enterprise with which you entered upon the erection of your new chapel, buying the needed land and putting up the building so that it was completed and dedicated on December 18, 1864,— hardly two years from the beginning of our ministry together; I have not told of the grateful act by which you both honored and adorned your sanctuary when you caused to be placed here the life-like memorial of your former minister; I have not told of the cheerful zeal with which needed repairs on church and organ, involving large cost, were made, or of the considerate care with which the growing needs of your pastor were anticipated and provided for. These, and other honorable proofs of your church zeal, are among the records of your proprietors. I am glad to find from a study of these records that only three times in a period of fifteen years have the running expenses of your church exceeded its regular income,— a result hardly equalled, I suspect, by many of your sister churches. This has been due to the economy and prudence with which your appropriations have been made. You have each year cut your garment according to your cloth. And you stand to-day without debt, and with all the advantages of church and chapel, in good condition, excellent organization, and competent constituency, able to do anything that can, in the nature of things, be done.

I congratulate you upon your achievements. I take pride with you in your record of work well done. I confide in you to do to-day, as in the past, the things that make for righteousness in the land. I hail the better future which, if you are alive to your opportunities, now opens before you,— that better future in

which it shall be given unto you to realize the Free Church of the Christian Liberal.

But, brethren, I am forgetting the business of historian, upon which I set out. My interest in your present and future welfare has robbed me of the coolness which befits the chronicler of things that are past. Among the labors undertaken by the latest minister in this church was the preparation of two historical sermons, narrating the life and work of his predecessors, from Mather Byles to Thomas Starr King,— 1732–1861. That duty done, it might have seemed well to leave the remainder of the story for the lenient hand of posterity to celebrate. But he did not think so, and therefore he preached his own memorial sermon, just as you have heard it, on the last day of September, 1877, fifteen years from the beginning of his ministry among you, and at twelve of the clock he stopped.

God save the Church of Christ in Hollis Street!